

Legislative Audit Division

State of Montana



Report to the Legislature

September 1996

EDP Audit Survey

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State Bulletin Board System

Department of Administration

This report provides information regarding the state bulletin board system and the responsibilities assigned to state personnel for its maintenance. It identifies areas, that if addressed, could improve the effectiveness of the BBS. The topics discussed include:

- ▶ Information upload to the BBS.
- ▶ Maintenance standards of BBS information.
- ▶ Use of BBS and associated costs.
- ▶ Technical support and training.
- ▶ The impact of the Internet.

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LEGISLATIVE AUDIT DIVISION

September 1996

The Legislative Audit Committee
of the Montana State Legislature:

This is our survey of the Montana State Bulletin Board System (BBS). The survey provides information regarding the responsibilities of the individual agencies and the Department of Administration (DofA) for maintaining the BBS. This report contains suggestions to improve the BBS. The suggestions include encouraging consistency of information for all state agencies, documenting policies and procedures on both the agency level and for DofA, implementing training programs for personnel, providing a user-friendly environment for the public, and exploring the use of the Internet in the future.

We wish to express our appreciation to the personnel of all state agencies and the Department of Administration for their cooperation and assistance.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott A. Seacat", is written over a horizontal line.
Scott A. Seacat
Legislative Auditor

Legislative Audit Division

EDP Audit Survey

State Bulletin Board System

Department of Administration

Members of the audit staff involved in this audit were Dawn Brewer and Alan Lloyd.

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Table of Contents

	List of Figures	ii
	Appointed and Administrative Officials	iii
Chapter I - Introduction and Background	Introduction	1
	Background	1
	Description of the BBS	2
	Scope of the Survey	2
	Organization of Report	3
Chapter II - Statutory Requirements	Introduction	5
	Statutory Requirements	5
	Definition	5
	Establishment	5
	Department of Administration Responsibilities	6
	Software Standards	6
	File Transfer/Message Services	6
	BBS Procedures	6
	BBS Security	7
	BBS Costs	7
	Individual Agency Responsibilities	8
Chapter III - Survey Results	Introduction	11
	Department of Administration Areas of Improvement	11
	Information Maintained on the BBS	11
	Statutorily Required Information	11
	Other Useful Information	12
	Maintenance Standards	13
	System Problems	14
	Training Procedures	15
	Utilization of BBS	16
	Agency Areas of Improvement	17
	SYSOP Assignment	17
	Backup Operator and Procedures	18
	Staff Awareness	19
	Future on the Internet	19
	Summary	20
Agency Response	Department of Administration	23

List of Figures

<u>Figure 1</u>	BBS Toll Free (800) Costs	8
<u>Figure 2</u>	State Bulletin Board System	9
<u>Figure 3</u>	BBS Toll Free (800) Usage	16

Appointed and Administrative Officials

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Chapter I - Introduction and Background

Introduction

In response to the legislative action establishing the State Bulletin Board System (BBS), the Legislative Audit Division conducted a survey of BBS operators. The purpose of the BBS is to encourage the practice of providing for direct citizen access to state computerized information. The purpose of this survey is to determine the extent of agency compliance with state law in achieving this goal.

Background

New advances in technology continue to change and improve communication. Electronic bulletin boards are an effective form of communication all over the world for those who have access to personal computers. The biggest benefit for these users is they can communicate in the convenience of their own home or business. Practically any type of information at any location can be found electronically with the aid of a modem and access to the Internet (International Network). The Internet is a worldwide computer network which allows the user a wide range of options from obtaining information to running a business. Bulletin boards and the Internet have changed the way people communicate and the way businesses operate since information is more easily obtainable.

The state of Montana continues to strive to improve the communications between state government and the public through the BBS. In the legislation which established the state BBS, the legislature assigned responsibility for the design and maintenance of the BBS to the Department of Administration. The BBS provides a database of government information to the public. The service is free to the public through use of the state's toll-free line and is accessible to anyone with a computer and modem. The department increases the number of toll-free access lines available from six to twelve during the legislative session due to increased usage. Many state employees have access to the BBS at their job station through the state network and do not use the toll-free line.

Chapter I - Introduction and Background

Description of the BBS

The BBS database consists of an area for each agency to enter and maintain data. Each agency has its own menu which is called the "Agency's Conference." One person from each agency is assigned responsibility for the agency's information on the BBS. That person gathers information and uploads the information to the agency's conference on the BBS under the appropriate menu item. Uploading is the process of transferring a personal computer file to the BBS.

Each agency also has Electronic Mail (E-Mail). E-Mail allows the public to send an electronic message to a particular agency. The message might consist of questions, comments, additional information, a request for information, etc. The agency has the ability to respond to the message through E-Mail. The message and response remain in a holding area on the BBS until the item is deleted from the system.

The BBS became permanent in 1993 and was revised in 1994 by the Department of Administration (DofA) to comply with the 1993 legislation. Revisions were made to screen presentations and the E-Mail process screens were changed by adding the color contrast feature making information more readable. Detailed option menus for each agency were also added making information easily obtainable. Users no longer search through pages of material to find what they need. DofA also revised the E-Mail system. The original BBS E-Mail system allowed contact with any and every state employee through E-Mail. This resulted in some inappropriate use by the public as messages could be left for any state employee using the toll-free line avoiding the expense of the long distance phone call for the caller. To solve this problem, E-Mail was limited to one generic ID for each agency. These revisions have improved the presentation and use of the BBS.

Scope of the Survey

This survey reviewed compliance with section 2-17-322, MCA, which requires all state agencies to maintain public information on the BBS. Designated agency operators were sent a questionnaire. A total of 47 surveys were sent and 43 operators responded. The questionnaire requested information about the procedures agency

Chapter I - Introduction and Background

operators follow when maintaining information on the BBS. The objectives of this survey were to determine:

1. What type of information agencies upload to the BBS and maintain for the public.
2. If agencies are in compliance with section 2-17-322, MCA.
3. Areas where BBS procedures could be improved to better provide information to the public.

This is the first analysis of Montana's state bulletin board system since its implementation in 1989. The majority of agencies responded to this survey completely. However, only agencies who had assigned a particular individual responsibility for the BBS were included in the survey. Other agencies still add information to the BBS but have not assigned the responsibility to anyone specifically, therefore were not included.

Organization of Report

In presenting the survey results we have organized the report into three chapters. Chapter I contains the introduction and background information of the BBS with the purpose, objectives, and scope of the survey.

Chapter II discusses the statutory requirements specified in the Montana Code Annotated. The referenced code section is contained in Appendix A. The statutory requirements define an electronic bulletin board, set guidelines for the establishment of the BBS, assign responsibility to the Department of Administration, and assign individual agency responsibility.

Chapter III discloses the survey results. This chapter points out areas of the BBS which could be improved and suggestions which should be considered. The chapter discusses information placed on the BBS, maintenance standards of information, utilization of information, agency procedures, technical support, and the impact of the Internet on the BBS.

Chapter II - Statutory Requirements

Introduction

The 1989 Legislature required the Department of Administration (DofA) to establish the BBS as a pilot project. The statute was amended by Chapter 166, Laws of 1993, which established the BBS as a permanent state service. Chapter 166 expanded the types of information to be included on the BBS and required DofA to support broader state agency and public use of the BBS. The definition, establishment, and responsibilities of the electronic bulletin board system can be found in sections 2-17-321 through 2-17-323, MCA, (see Appendix A) and discussed below.

Statutory Requirements

Definition

Section 2-17-321, MCA, defines an electronic bulletin board as a remote database of state government information which is available to anyone who has access to a computer, a modem, and a telephone line. The bulletin board is currently accessible to anyone with the equipment and free of charge to instate users via the toll-free telephone line provided by the state. The state provides a communication line with the public so information can be accessed easily. The public can also communicate with each agency directly through the BBS E-Mail system, which allows messages to be sent, stored, and answered by the agencies.

Establishment

Section 2-17-322, MCA, provides the development of the BBS to be responsibility of DofA. DofA created the BBS with the appropriate software and continues to maintain the BBS, keeping the system operational and providing periodic enhancements to improve the BBS.

Section 2-17-322, MCA, assigns individual agencies the responsibility of maintaining their own data on the BBS. Agencies are required by law to put certain information on the BBS as it applies to their organization. Listed below are reports required by law to be included on the BBS:

Chapter II - Statutory Requirements

- Environmental assessments
- Rulemaking notices
- Board vacancy notices
- Mandated agency reports
- Parks reports
- Requests for bids or proposals
- Public meeting notices and agendas

However, the agency is not limited to only what is mandated by law. Agencies have the option to put information on the BBS which they think is appropriate to make available for public use.

Department of Administration Responsibilities

Section 2-17-323, MCA, defines the specific responsibilities of DofA. The primary responsibilities of DofA are mandated by law and are discussed below.

Software Standards

The department is responsible for setting software standards for the BBS and for providing technical support. Currently the system accepts files from Lotus and WordPerfect. Department descriptions are loaded and stored in ASCII format. In order for an individual to download a file, the user must have software that can accept the format in which the file was created. The Information Services Division (ISD) plans to implement a universal format which will not have this limitation.

File Transfer/Message Services

The department is also responsible for creating file transfer services and message services which are user friendly. Services should be customized for those entities which interact with state government regularly such as citizen groups or public associations. These additional services should reduce traditional copying and mailing costs for state government.

BBS Procedures

The department is required to develop procedures for the operation and maintenance of the BBS. Procedures should provide a reference tool for the department as well as the users. The procedures should also be used as a basis for implementing a training program to ensure that all new users receive proper instruction on using the BBS. Additional training should be provided to operators when there are revisions to the BBS so that the system can continue to run efficiently.

Chapter II - Statutory Requirements

BBS Security

Department responsibilities include providing a statewide security system to assure that inaccurate or misleading information is not uploaded to the BBS for use by the public. When the BBS was implemented, each agency was given a unique user identifier (user ID) and generic password. The agency was instructed to assign the user ID to an individual who became the system operator (SYSOP) for that agency. The SYSOP was instructed to change the password. Any time information is uploaded or an inquiry made, that associated user ID is logged with the date, time, and action which was taken.

System operators are the only people who have access to enter information to the BBS. However, not all agencies have assigned the user ID to an individual, so generic passwords still exist. Anyone who knows the user ID and password can access the uploading function of the BBS for that agency. Agencies may also have more than one user assigned if they submitted a request to the department and have the need for more than one SYSOP. Users of the system are also logged but will not have a number assigned to them since they are not restricted from reading any of the information contained in the BBS. Users are logged by the name they initially put in to access the system.

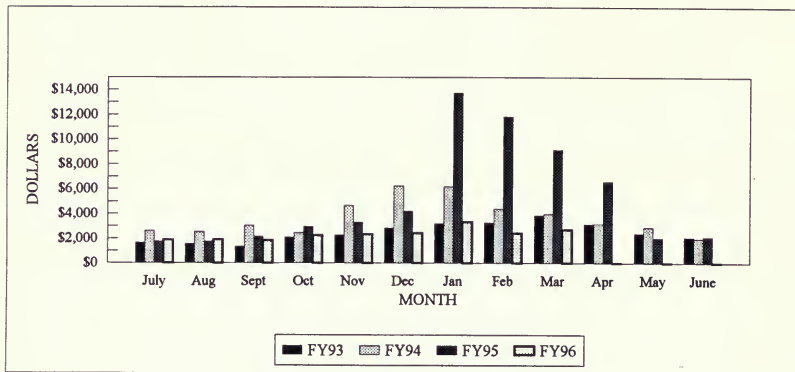
BBS Costs

The department must provide the means to recover the costs of maintaining the BBS. The department funds the cost of the BBS through the data network fees. The department currently tracks information on BBS usage and cost. The major cost of the BBS is the toll-free phone line. This cost has escalated with increased usage in the past few years. Figure 1 reflects cost information for the BBS as reported by the Department of Administration.

Chapter II - Statutory Requirements

Figure 1

BBS Toll Free (800) Costs



Individual Agency Responsibilities

Section 2-17-323, MCA, specifies that each agency is responsible for the integrity and appropriateness of the information it reports on the BBS. Information required by section 2-17-322, MCA, should be uploaded to the BBS. However, agencies are not limited to information which is required by statute and are allowed flexibility to determine other types of information which may be appropriate to upload to the BBS.

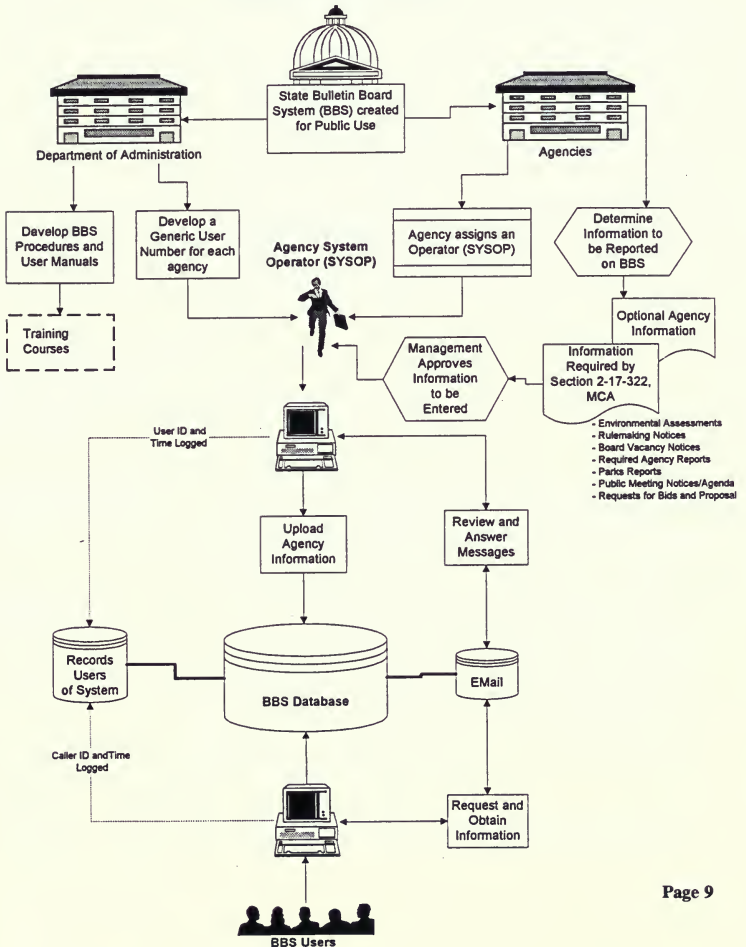
Agencies are also responsible to respond to the public through the E-Mail system. These E-Mail messages from the public should be responded to in a timely matter and are currently monitored by DofA staff who will contact agencies if an E-Mail message remains unanswered on the system for over two weeks.

Figure 2 shows the flow of information and the associated DofA and agency responsibilities for the state BBS.

Chapter II - Statutory Requirements

Figure 2

State Bulletin Board System



Chapter III - Survey Results

Introduction

The survey was sent to all the system operators (SYSOPs), which consisted of 47 surveys. All but four agencies responded. A survey was not sent to the agencies which have not yet assigned an individual responsibility as a SYSOP. This issue is covered later in this chapter. The survey results revealed areas needing improvement in order to achieve the legislation's intent of conveying appropriate information to the citizens of Montana. The following sections discuss areas to improve the efficiency of the BBS by DofA or at the agency level. DofA has general authority to maintain the BBS as covered by section 2-17-501(e), MCA, which states DofA shall operate and maintain a central computer center and a statewide data network for the use of all state agencies and political subdivisions. This chapter discloses the results of the survey by breaking down the areas needing improvement between DofA and the agencies. This chapter also discusses the future impact of the Internet.

Department of Administration Areas of Improvement

Information Maintained on the BBS

For purposes of this survey, the types of information maintained on the BBS include information required by statute and information not required but deemed appropriate for public use. This section discusses how information is being maintained by the agencies.

Statutorily Required Information

Section 2-17-322, MCA, requires certain information be maintained on the BBS but not all information applies to every agency. For example, the Montana Arts Council would not be required to place environmental assessments on the BBS as this requirement would not apply. The agency must enter (upload) required information which is applicable to that agency. The majority of agencies use section 2-17-322, MCA, as a guideline to determine what information to put on the BBS.

The survey results indicate the majority of respondents are in compliance with the law. However, 15 percent of the agencies

Chapter III - Survey Results

which responded were not entering mandated information on the BBS. These agencies claim that lack of funds and resources are the main reasons for noncompliance. They also claim lack of technical support sometimes limits their ability to get the required information on the system. This noncompliance could result in lack of public confidence in the BBS since required information is not available. The public may get frustrated with the lack of information and avoid obtaining it from the BBS.

Other Useful Information

Section 2-17-322, MCA, also states that agencies are not limited to those items which are mandated and may include various other types of information on the BBS if the agency believes it to be appropriate. Information should go through stringent screening by the agency to ensure it is accurate and appropriate for the BBS. Agency legal counsel could be involved to determine whether information is open to the public (not defined as confidential) and management should decide if information could be useful to the public.

In our survey we found a group of agencies who upload additional information to the BBS which provides additional public services. The following is a small sample of appropriate reports not mandated by law which are currently loaded to the BBS:

- Pension Valuations/Disclosures
- Water Rights Information
- Labor Market Information
- Description of Budget Analysis/Fiscal Reports
- Travel Montana Program Information
- State/County Demographic Information
- Grant Awards
- Press Releases/Speeches
- Changes in Tax Laws

Although some agencies currently report additional information, a major group of agencies stated they limit the information they put on the BBS to only that required by law. Since no authority exists to hold agencies accountable for the information maintained on the BBS, only the minimum is processed. In each agency there is a vast array of public information which could be made available to the public. If the BBS contains only limited information, the public will continue to contact staff for answers regarding information which is currently not required by law.

Chapter III - Survey Results

Agencies currently maintain no consistency with the type of information they put on the BBS and even fail to upload that which is required by law. DofA should encourage agencies to a) enter information required by law, and b) identify and upload additional information which might be useful to the public.

Maintenance Standards

Each agency should have guidelines for maintaining information on the BBS in order to provide the public with accurate and timely government information as originally intended by the legislature. Guidelines for adding, updating, and deleting data, (appropriate to the type of data put on the BBS) should be established. The survey requested the agency to identify whether it followed any maintenance standard, and if so, what the standard was. The table below shows the percentage of agencies following each type of maintenance standard:

Maintenance Standards for BBS Information	How often is information uploaded?	How long is information retained before deleted?
On a Routine Schedule	50 %	30 %
When Information Becomes Outdated	30 %	40 %
As Time Permits	20 %	30 %

The first group updates information periodically on a set schedule or routine. Half of the agencies stated they upload information on a periodic basis and a third of them delete items regularly. Agencies in this group update on a daily, weekly, biweekly, or monthly basis depending on the type of data. Maintaining the BBS on a regular basis ensures that information is timely and accurate. When updating on a regular basis there is less chance that outdated information will remain on the system or new information will be overlooked.

The second group only uploads information when they receive it and delete information when it is outdated. They do not update the

Chapter III - Survey Results

system on a regular basis. About one third of the responding agencies do not have guidelines which establish periodic maintenance. These agencies update the BBS only when necessary. Many types of BBS data have set expiration dates which makes it easy to determine when information has become outdated. However, some information remains on the BBS for extended periods of time. The agency believes that information may be useful to the public for long period of time. Although information is generally updated as new information becomes available, this inattentive method of updating the BBS may result in the conference being neglected or possibly forgotten in day to day activities since no routine is established.

The third group only updates the BBS when they have spare time which for some agencies is infrequent. These agencies do not have guidelines and do not update regularly. They generally update the BBS as time permits. This results in information not reaching the public in a timely fashion and/or information being inaccurate since it is obsolete. Obsolete items may remain on the system for extended periods of time and never be updated with current information. For example, we found items on the system from 1994. Agencies in this classification state they lack the resources to maintain the BBS and do not believe the BBS to be a useful and effective tool in dealing with the public.

DofA should establish and document guidelines for maintaining the information on the BBS.

System Problems

DofA is also responsible for making information available to the public in a user friendly manner according to section 2-17-323, MCA. However, DofA has reported that the downloading of files has been a problem for some users since the revision of the BBS in 1993. In order to download, a user must have software that can accept the format the file was originally created in. Downloading is an optional process for users to get information to their own PC's. However, downloading is required for bills since they cannot be viewed in the BBS system. Users must download the information on their personal computer so telephone lines can be opened up for other calls. This difficulty in downloading results in user frustration and lack of use. DofA is aware of this problem

Chapter III - Survey Results

and is looking at ways to improve the BBS, but resources and funds can lower the priority of such projects.

DofA should look at ways to make the system more user friendly and adopt a universal format for storing BBS information.

Training Procedures

Technical support from the Department of Administration is essential to the BBS and is mandated by section 2-17-323, MCA. DofA is responsible for providing procedures for the BBS which become a basis for training operators. DofA currently has no formal training procedures for employees who are new to the position or for additional training when revisions are made to the BBS. Many operators stated they had to learn the BBS on their own and contacted DofA on an "as needed" basis. These same operators believe the BBS to be cumbersome and not user friendly. Other operators stated that changes were made to the system and not communicated. These operators discovered the changes when they were no longer able to get into the system.

Lack of training can cause difficulty for operators resulting in information not being maintained on the BBS properly, if at all. Training could provide these users with the technical knowledge they require as well as build confidence and awareness in the system. Training could emphasize the importance of BBS and how it can assist in reducing public inquiries of agencies. DofA is aware of the need for training but has not yet been able to remedy the situation due to other job priorities. However, DofA is currently working on revising documentation to start training courses in the near future.

Department of Administration should: a) update documentation of BBS procedures; b) provide formal training to new employees; and, c) provide additional training when revisions have occurred on the system.

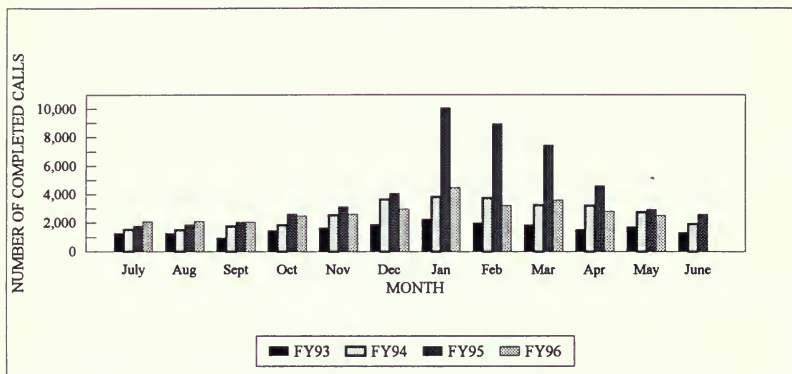
Chapter III - Survey Results

Utilization of BBS

There has been a significant increase in public usage of the BBS because a) more people have access to computers, b) public awareness has increased, c) improvements made to the BBS, and d) the information provided by the agencies. Usage is especially high during the legislative session as users obtain bill information. The following figure reports the number of toll-free calls to the BBS from the public as reported by the Department of Administration:

Figure 3

BBS Toll Free (800) Usage



The survey results also indicate substantial usage of the BBS by state employees. Legislative information is used by government staff during a session. Information is used to track bills, hearing times, and to download the text of bills. Weather information is often used by management and staff when planning a business trip. The BBS is also used extensively by those who are not state employees. Court decisions in the Judicial conference are used for legal research all over the state. News reporters and agribusiness

associations use the BBS to obtain state information such as agricultural statistics used for current prices of commodities.

Although there is substantial public and state usage of the BBS, 40 percent of BBS operators surveyed believe no one uses the BBS and that it is a waste of time and effort to maintain it. Many agencies base this opinion on the fact that they never receive feedback, such as E-Mail, from users. They believe no one looks at the information they upload since no one replies. However, for agencies who use the BBS to its full potential, E-Mail and user feedback is evident. The reason agencies may not be receiving feedback is that they are not maintaining the BBS appropriately and their information is limited. The public will choose to get their information through direct contact with the agency since they believe the agency is not using the BBS to communicate information.

DofA should make agencies more aware of the importance of the BBS and seek to provide the capabilities to allow the agencies to monitor inquiries into the agency conferences. Adequate training can show agencies how they can use the BBS to communicate to the public.

Agency Areas of Improvement

SYSOP Assignment

To ensure accountability for any agency activity on the BBS, each agency should assign an individual to be responsible for the BBS and provide DofA with the name so that it can be assigned to the agency's user ID. Section 2-17-323, MCA, states that each agency is responsible for the integrity of information which they put on the system. In our survey, we found not all agencies had assigned individuals to the user ID. Thirty-four percent of Montana agencies have assigned a person responsibility for the BBS to an individual and have established accountability. Agencies still enter information to the BBS through use of their generic agency number but no individual is accountable for the information loaded to the BBS. Information could be loaded inaccurately or improper

Chapter III - Survey Results

information could be entered since the responsible individual could not be determined.

DofA must also be informed of any changes to agency user numbers. In our review, individuals who had terminated employment still had valid SYSOP user IDs attached to their names. These agencies did not inform DofA of the termination nor change the password of the SYSOP user ID. This allows employees who have terminated employment to upload information to the BBS and does not ensure the integrity of information.

Agencies should assign their agency user ID to an individual and establish security policies regarding the BBS which include informing DofA of any change in system operators.

Backup Operator and Procedures

Many agencies do not have a backup operator for the BBS nor have documented policies and procedures which are essential in case of employee turnover. State law specifies that agencies are responsible for the information which they put on BBS. If no backup arrangements are made, then the BBS may be overlooked and information would be omitted or inaccurate. The survey results revealed a few individuals who had replaced previous BBS operators but were unaware of the BBS system. These people were not aware this responsibility was part of their job duties. These individuals had to seek further assistance through DofA to find out about this system since the agency had no documented procedures nor does DofA have any training classes for new operators.

Agencies should establish a backup operator and document policies and procedures for the BBS. BBS responsibilities should be documented in employee position descriptions. Instruction should be provided to new employees and should include staff as well as operators.

Staff Awareness

Although many agencies have one operator who is assigned the duty of maintaining information on the BBS, all staff should be aware of the BBS and help to collect information. State law requires that agencies enter information which is accurate and appropriate. If appropriate staff are not involved in the BBS then information may be incomplete, vague, or even biased. The survey results indicate that about 35 percent of operators are solely responsible for the BBS and receive no additional assistance from other staff. Everyone should be encouraged to assist and contribute to the success of the BBS.

Agencies should make all staff aware of the BBS and encourage ideas for BBS use, as well as, staff support for the BBS operator.

Future on the Internet

The Internet (International Network) is an advanced communication tool for personal computer users. A few agencies have already started entering state information onto the Internet for communicating with other states, their constituents (eg., job seekers), or to provide information to the public (eg., travel promotion). These agencies currently duplicate their efforts by entering information both on the Internet and the BBS. These agencies question the efficiency of the BBS and believe that the BBS should be maintained on the Internet.

The Internet provides a similar technology as the BBS in that an individual with a PC, modem, and telephone line can access information electronically. A few significant differences exist. The Internet provides a wide open environment with limited security. This allows the user to search any location which makes its information available. In addition, the Internet is a computer network to which users must obtain access via an outside service and software at their own expense. Section 2-17-321, MCA, states that the bulletin board is to be available to anyone in the state with a computer, modem, and telephone line. Since not all BBS users are Internet subscribers, the system may not be accessible to all. However, advancing technology may provide a way for the state to provide service through the Internet either now or in the future. State law also specifically requires the use of the bulletin board technology. If DofA were to consider using the Internet to provide

Chapter III - Survey Results

public access to state government information then the statute should be amended. If these issues are resolved and the Internet is used, agencies will no longer duplicate efforts by putting information on the Internet and the BBS.

DofA should propose legislation which would allow them flexibility in providing electronic access to state government information. DofA should continue to monitor the progress of the Internet and pursue technology advancements which may allow options for state agencies to provide access to the state's information through the Internet, or other access capabilities.

Summary

Through our survey, we found an environment where controls could be improved to make the BBS more productive. The BBS is required by law and should be considered a high priority. An individual needs to be designated to oversee the BBS to assure that it is properly utilized and providing proper information. Agencies have been given control of their conference and need the training to properly manage the BBS. Guidelines should be established for the information put on the BBS, the maintenance standards for updating, and the security of the system. Awareness needs to be created showing the importance of the BBS and the support needed for its success.

The BBS and/or the Internet can be effective communication tools with the public and can save valuable staff time by providing government information electronically through the use of computers. Use of electronic communication (via BBS technology or the Internet) is predicted to increase as more people either obtain personal computers or access to one and become more aware of the use this tool. Through training and awareness, state agencies can use electronic communication to its full potential creating a source for inquiries into state government. If the BBS and/or the Internet are used to their full potential, the public would take more interest and acquire needed information electronically. Through the BBS, and/or the Internet, staff time could be free for other duties since there would probably be a decrease of phone inquiries. Automation would further increase efficiency in state government.

Agency Response

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION
INFORMATION SERVICES DIVISION



MARC RACICOT
GOVERNOR

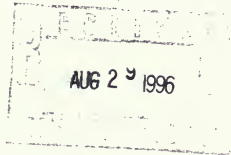
ROOM 229, MITCHELL BUILDING
125 N. ROBERTS

STATE OF MONTANA

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PO BOX 200113
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-0113

August 29, 1996



Mary Bryson
Deputy Legislative Auditor for
Operations and EDP Audits
Legislative Audit Division
Legislative Branch

Dear Mary:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your recent EDP Audit Survey of the State Bulletin Board System (BBS). Your survey has resulted in valuable information regarding the BBS, and how it can be improved.

As your report points out, usage of the BBS has consistently grow since its inception. This has been particularly true during legislative sessions when bill status information is accessed. In spite of this growth, there still are areas of non-compliance. We agree substantially with your recommendations to our office to improve our guidelines, procedures, and training for the BBS, and to streamline and make the system more user friendly.

In this regard, we are in the process of examining external contracts to provide the BBS system. Through this process we hope to achieve many of the objectives you speak to in the report.

We particularly agree with your recommendation to pursue options to the BBS for state agencies to provide electronic access to state information. As the Internet continues to grow, state agencies are looking to the Internet as the means to provide public access to information. At this time 13 departments and all university units have a great deal of information available through the Montana Online homepage on the Internet. We expect this to grow to include all agencies. As this new activity grows we will continue to need to manage the BBS in order to provide access to citizens who do not have Internet access. We will develop our processes and procedures to simplify access to information from both systems.

We have prepared legislation which will provide flexibility in providing electronic access to state government information, as your last recommendation suggests. This legislative change is

Mary Bryson
August 29, 1996
Page 2

appropriate to describe "electronic access" as the objective of the statute, as opposed to a particular technology (i.e., the BBS). I have attached a copy of our proposed legislation for your consideration. If the Audit Committee concurs with this approach, the Department would be pleased if the Committee would consider sponsoring this legislation.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to respond to your survey.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Herbert". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line above the first name.

Tony Herbert, Administrator
Information Services Division

cc: Lois Menzies

2-17-321. Definition of electronic bulletin board access system. As used in 2-17-322 and 2-17-323, "electronic bulletin board access system" means a remote data base system containing capable of making various types of information accessible by means of a computer, a modem, and a telephone line telecommunications facility. Electronic access systems may be bulletin board systems, internet world wide web servers, or other computer/telecommunications systems.

History

History: En. Sec. 1, Ch. 268, L. 1989.

2-17-322. Establishment.

2-17-322. Establishment. (1) The department of administration shall establish and maintain an appropriate electronic access system for state agencies to use as a means of conveying information to the citizens of Montana. Agencies involved in communicating information to the public shall use this system to provide maintain appropriate information on the bulletin board system to the public, including but not limited to:

- (a) environmental assessments;
- (b) rulemaking notices;
- (c) board vacancy notices as required by 2-15-201;
- (d) agency reports mandated by statute;
- (e) parks reports required by 23-1-110;
- (f) requests for bids or proposals; and
- (g) public meeting notices and agendas.

(2) The purpose of the centralized electronic bulletin board access system is to encourage the practice of providing for direct citizen access to state computerized information.

History

History: En. Sec. 2, Ch. 268, L. 1989; amd. Sec. 1, Ch. 166, L. 1993.

Compiler's Comments

Compiler's Comments:

1993 Amendment: Chapter 166 in (1), in first sentence after "maintain", deleted "as a pilot project"; inserted (1)(a) through (1)(g) regarding information to be maintained on the bulletin board system; in (2), near beginning, substituted "the centralized electronic bulletin board system" for "this pilot project"; and made minor changes in style.

Report to the Legislature: Section 4, Ch. 268, L. 1989, provided: "The department of administration shall submit a report to the 52nd legislature that evaluates the effectiveness of the centralized electronic bulletin board system, provides a cost analysis of the system, and presents recommendations for improving or enhancing the system."

2-17-323. Responsibilities.

2-17-323. Responsibilities. (1) The department of administration shall:

- (a) set standards for the selection of software for the electronic bulletin boards access systems;
- (b) establish appropriate services on the centralized electronic bulletin board system to support file transfer by all state agencies;
- (c) develop user-friendly file transfer and message systems for entities regularly interacting with state government, such as professional associations and citizen groups, and promote the systems' use to reduce copying and mailing costs for state government; and
- (d) determine procedures for bulletin board electronic access system use.

(2) The department shall provide security to protect the integrity of its electronic bulletin board access system. Each department is responsible for ensuring the integrity and appropriateness of the information that it places in the system.

(3) The department shall provide for an equitable method for recovering the cost of operating the electronic bulletin board access system.

History

History: En. Sec. 3, Ch. 268, L. 1989; amd. Sec. 2, Ch. 166, L. 1993.

Compiler's Comments

Compiler's Comments:

1993 Amendment: Chapter 166 inserted (1)(b) requiring establishment of services to support file transfers; and inserted (1)(c) requiring development of user-friendly file transfer and message systems and promotion of system use.

Cross References

Cross References:

Security responsibilities of Department of Administration, 2-17-503.

Part 4. Vehicles

Appendix A

2-17-321. Definition of electronic bulletin board.

As used in 2-17-322 and 2-17-323, "electronic bulletin board" means a remote data base system containing various types of information accessible by means of a computer, a modem, and a telephone line.

2-17-322. Establishment.

- (1) The department of administration shall establish and maintain a centralized electronic bulletin board system for state agencies to use as a means of conveying information to the citizens of Montana. Agencies involved in communicating information to the public shall maintain appropriate information on the bulletin board system, including but not limited to:
 - (a) environmental assessments;
 - (b) rulemaking notices;
 - (c) board vacancy notices as required by 2-15-201;
 - (d) agency reports mandated by statute;
 - (e) parks reports required by 23-1-110;
 - (f) requests for bids or proposals; and
 - (g) public meeting notices and agendas.
- (2) The purpose of the centralized electronic bulletin board system is to encourage the practice of providing for direct citizen access to state computerized information.

2-17-323. Responsibilities.

- (1) The department of administration shall:
 - (a) set standards for the selection of software for the electronic bulletin boards;
 - (b) establish appropriate services on the centralized electronic bulletin board system to support file transfer by all state agencies;
 - (c) develop user-friendly file transfer and message systems for entities regularly interacting with state government, such as professional associations and citizen groups, and promote the systems' use to reduce copying and mailing costs for state government; and
 - (d) determine procedures for bulletin board use.
- (2) The department shall provide security to protect the integrity of its electronic bulletin board system. Each department is responsible for ensuring the integrity and appropriateness of the information that it places in the system.
- (3) The department shall provide for an equitable method for recovering the cost of operating the electronic bulletin board system.

